

Essex Family Forum

Family Impact Survey 2024



Home to School SEND Transport Report

Date of Report: November 2024

Survey conducted:

1st February 2024 - 17th March 2024

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Methodology	3
Number of Participants.....	4
Disclaimer.....	4
General Information	5
Responses by Area.....	6
Education Settings	7
Home to School SEND Transport.....	8
Home to School SEND Transport (continued)	9
Home to School SEND Transport (continued)	10
Comments.....	11
Conclusion and Next Steps.....	12

Introduction

This is our fourth Annual Family Impact Survey. We have expanded the scope of the survey each year by adding additional questions to existing sections and adding new sections. We have based these on the most consistent themes from the feedback we have received from families in all the forms we receive it. (e.g. our Family Champion network, virtual Graffiti Wall, Local Offer Roadshows, coffee mornings).

The aim of our survey is to detail parent/carer experiences in trying to secure the right support at the right time for their children/young people at the time they need it. We are then able to compare the current situation with what families' have told us in our previous surveys. We are then able to identify where there has been any improvement in those experiences and where families are still finding it challenging to obtain the right support for their child/young person.

The results of our previous surveys can be found on our [website. It has been challenging to](#) obtain a timely response on the findings from our previous surveys from the relevant teams and services across education, health and social care. We have, therefore, decided to separate the findings from this year's survey into specific reports for each section of the survey as follows:

- Education, Health and Care Plans - Statutory Processes including Needs Assessments, Annual Reviews and Appeals and Tribunals
- Neurodevelopment Conditions Assessments - Referrals, Waiting Times, Pre and Post Diagnostic Support and Information
- SEN Support, One Planning, Communication and Support with Education Settings
- Home to School SEND Transport
- Home Education, Unable to Attend and Education Other than at School (EOTAS)
- Therapies
- Mental Health Support
- Social Care and Short Breaks Clubs & Activities
- Preparing for Adulthood
- Sources of Information and Support

This report concentrates on Home to School SEND Transport. We are also including the general information we collect, such as ethnicity, gender and area in which participants live.

Methodology

- Survey period: 1st February 2024 to 17th March 2024
- The survey was conducted via Survey Monkey and designed with both qualitative and quantitative questions. Throughout this report, we have included samples of the verbatim comments received from families. We have removed any personal or potentially identifying information from those comments such as individual names, settings and service providers.
- The names of settings and service providers will be available, upon request by Essex County Council (ECC) or the Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) but will only be provided in terms of the 'theme' within which they were mentioned. They will not be attributed to any specific comment - in line with the collection of data policy as outlined in the previous bullet point.
- The survey was promoted via Essex Family Forum social media, our Family Champion Network, connected support groups and through Email Octopus to our members. We also circulated to our various contacts at Essex County Council and the Integrated Care Boards for onward circulation via their communication channels. We used separate links this year so we can identify where the survey received the greatest engagement. We are delighted that those sent via our membership and Family Champion Network counted for over half of all the responses, with social media counting for one third of the overall responses. 87 parent/carers received their link via their child/young person's education setting.

Number of Participants

There were **1240** valid entries for the survey this year, as all participants who started our survey gave consent for their anonymized responses to be used and shared.

Participants were directed to sections of the survey via “skip logic” based responses they gave. They were also able to skip certain questions if they did not wish to provide a response. Therefore, participants only completed sections that were relevant to them and did not need to answer every question within the survey. The responses shown are based on the numbers of participants that answered that particular question.

The number of families completing our survey is increasing each year. In 2020 we received 638 valid entries, 517 in 2022 and 923 in 2023.

Disclaimer

The information and comments presented in this report and appendices are the views of the survey respondents and in no way, express or implied, should be construed to represent the views of Essex Family Forum CIC. Essex Family Forum's purpose is established under the legal requirements of the Children and Families Act 2014. We therefore have a duty to faithfully relay the views and experiences of parents and carers of children and young people with SEND aged 0 - 25 years with regard to the services they use. Essex Family Forum aims to work co-productively with services to improve the users' experiences and to recognise good practices. Essex Family Forum accepts no legal liability for the personal accounts, views, or opinions that survey respondents shared.

General Information

The number of participants who are parents has remained fairly static. A number of participants who selected 'Other' stated their parental status (Mother or Father).

Based on our previous surveys in 2020, 2022 and 2023, there is no significant difference in the gender of children/young people, or in the age ranges of children/young people. The percentage difference between 2023 and 2024 is shown in brackets

Our survey respondents were predominantly white British. This is at a higher proportion than the general population of Essex according to the latest census figures (2021).

Parent

95% (-1%)*

Male child

62% (-2%)

Ethnicity

White British - **90%**
(2021 Census Data = 86%)

Age of Child / Young Person

Early Years - 10% (=)

Primary - 45% (-3%)

Secondary - 34% (+1%)

Post 16 - 7% (+1%)

Post 19 - 4% (+1%)

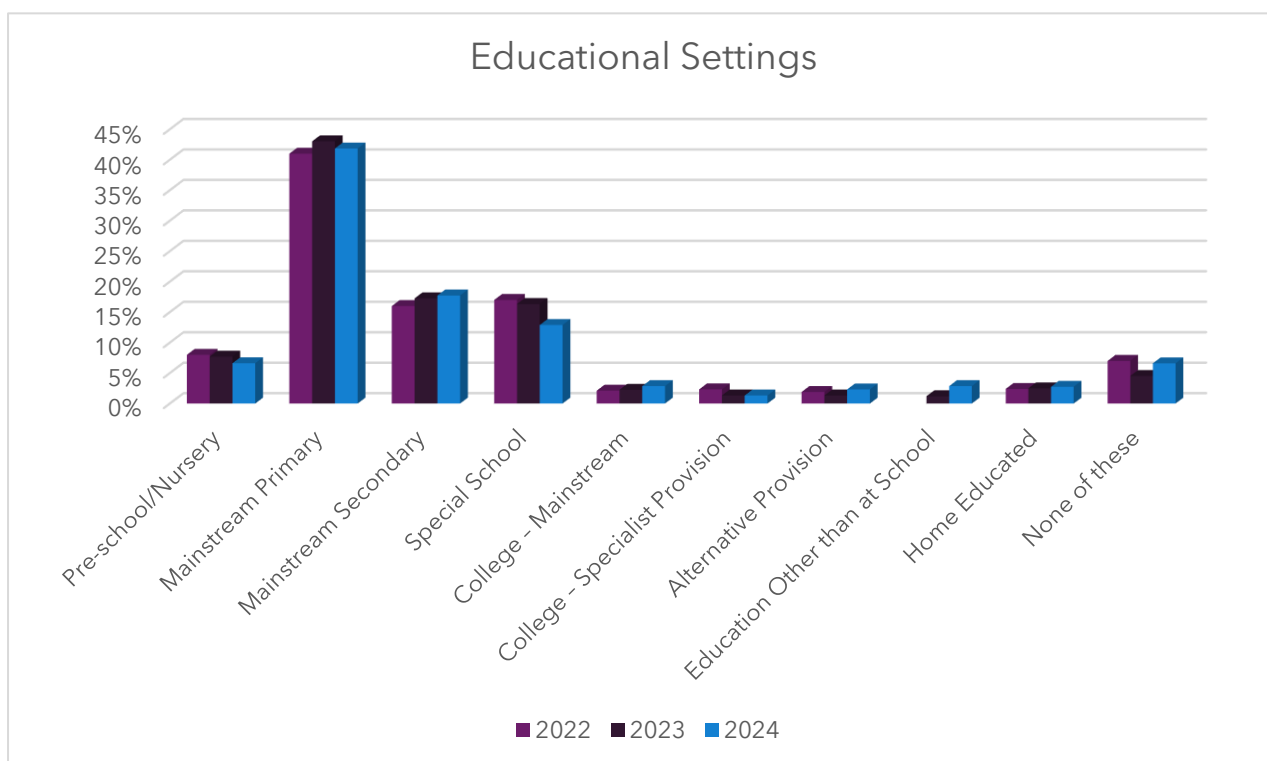
Responses by Area

We ask our survey respondents to indicate which area of Essex they live in, as Essex is divided, administratively, into four quadrant areas. We can also identify the local NHS Integrated Care Board that will be responsible for providing health services. By asking this question we can compare how reflective of the population, by area, our survey participants are. We are also able to filter our data to highlight the experiences of SEND families in each of the areas and compare the similarities and differences.

Area	West Essex	Mid Essex	South Essex	North East Essex
% of overall population*	21%	27%	29%	23%
Local Council	Harlow, Epping, Uttlesford	Chelmsford, Maldon, Braintree	Basildon, Brentwood, Castle Point and Rochford	Colchester, Tendring
% of survey respondents per area	20%	28%	27%	28%
% difference with 2023 survey	(+5%)	(-4%)	(-5%)	(+8%)

*[Office for National Statistics - Census 2021](#)

Education Settings



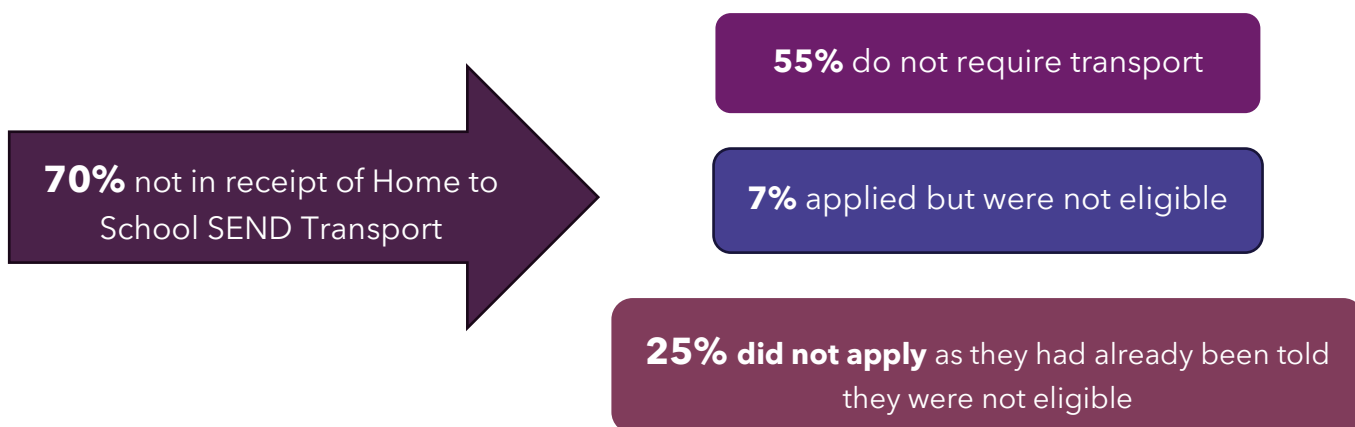
- Education Other than At School - 2023 was the first year it was included so there is no corresponding data for 2022.
- The option for Home Education was split further into 2 categories:
 - ◆ Home Education as a lifestyle choice
 - ◆ Home Education through no other option*

**The proportion of parent/carers who home educate through no other option is 4 times higher than those that do so as a lifestyle choice.*

- Settings where the total was under 1% were:
 - ◆ Specialist hub - Primary
 - ◆ Specialist hub - Secondary
 - ◆ Virtual School
 - ◆ University (4 people stated their young person is studying at university)
 - ◆ Apprenticeship/Internship/Work based training
- This year, none of the respondents said their young people were in employment.
- The percentage of participants whose child/young person was not in school, employment or training slightly increased, but they have remained fairly static over the last three years.
 - ◆ As in previous years, the biggest proportion of those are compulsory age children, either on roll at a mainstream school or special school but not able to attend, awaiting a placement, or there is no suitable placement.
 - ◆ The next biggest proportion are still young people unable to access Post 16 or Post 19 provision, training or employment.

Home to School SEND Transport

Questions on Home to School SEND Transport were only open to participants whose child/young person has an Education, Health and Care Plan.



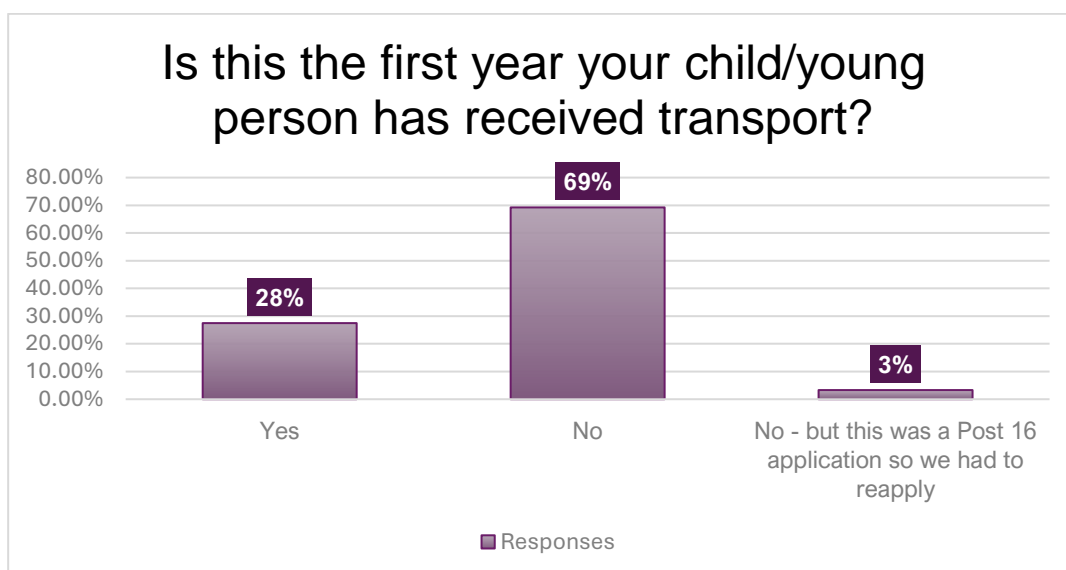
The main reasons participants were not eligible for transport were:

- It was not the nearest suitable school
- Family live within statutory walking distance

Over 1/3 of families cited 'Other' reasons but these mainly fell within these two categories. However, a number of families said their child/young was attending an alternative provision.

The number of parent/carers who say they did not apply as they had **already** been told they were not eligible has increased by 4%.

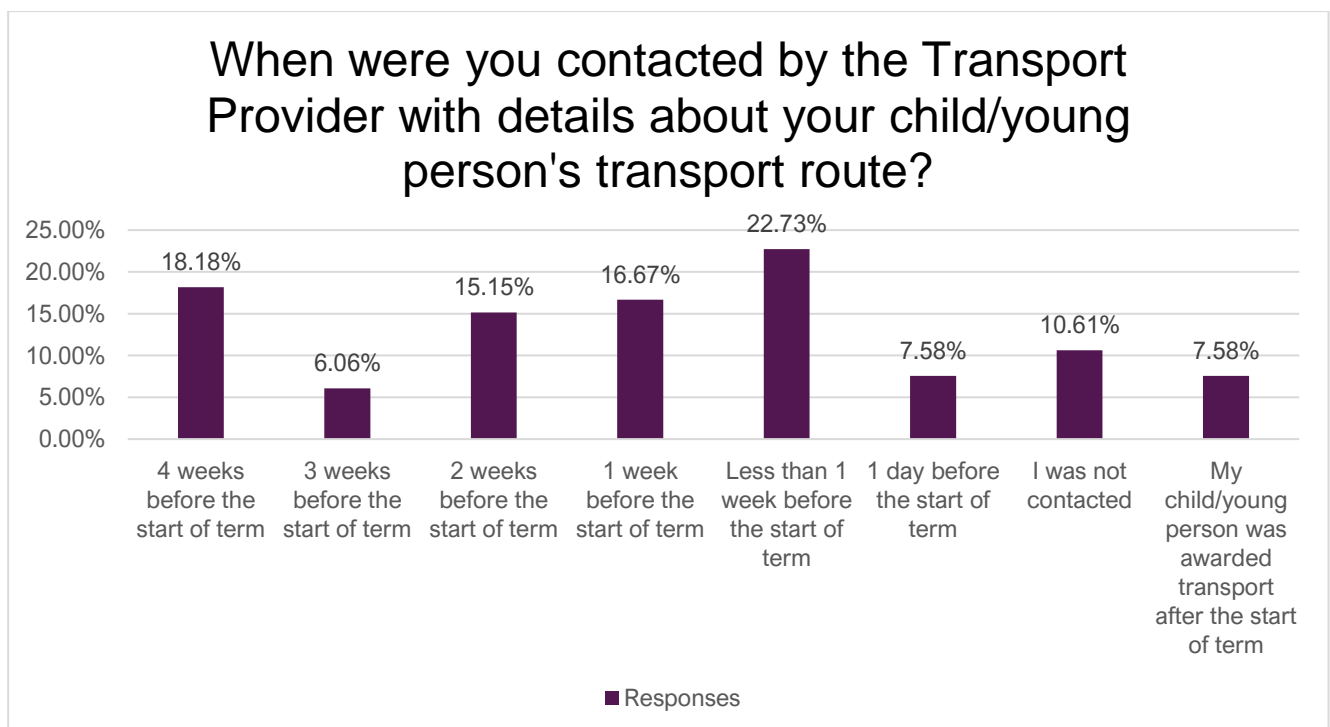
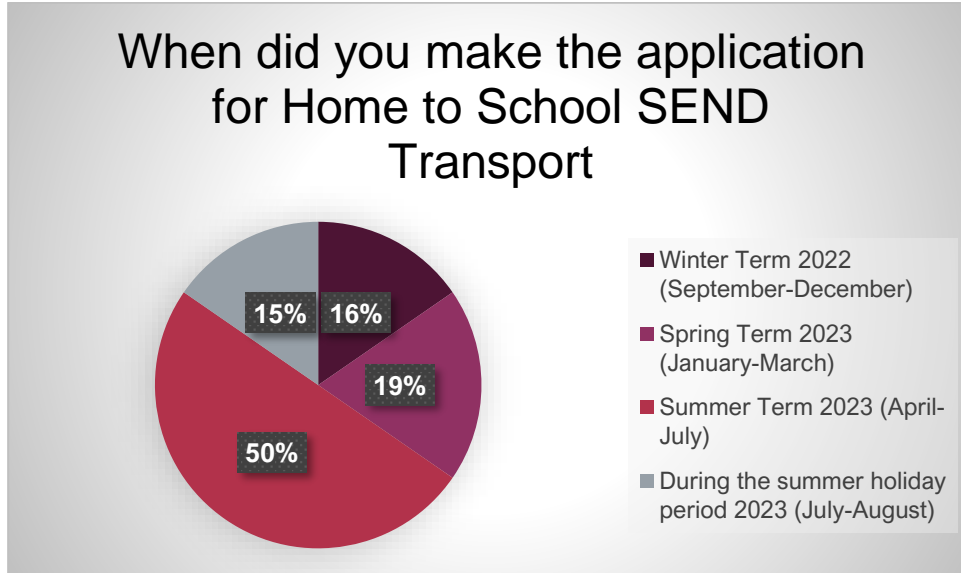
This year's survey included some questions on the timing of new applications. We are aware that the timing of new applications for transport has an impact on providers' ability to timely plan routes and personnel. This results in late notification to families of transport arrangements for the new academic year and, sometimes, a number of changes to routes, drivers and passenger assistants in the first few weeks of the school year. Children and young people can be very unsettled by this uncertainty, and it often causes undue stress and anxiety for the wider family.



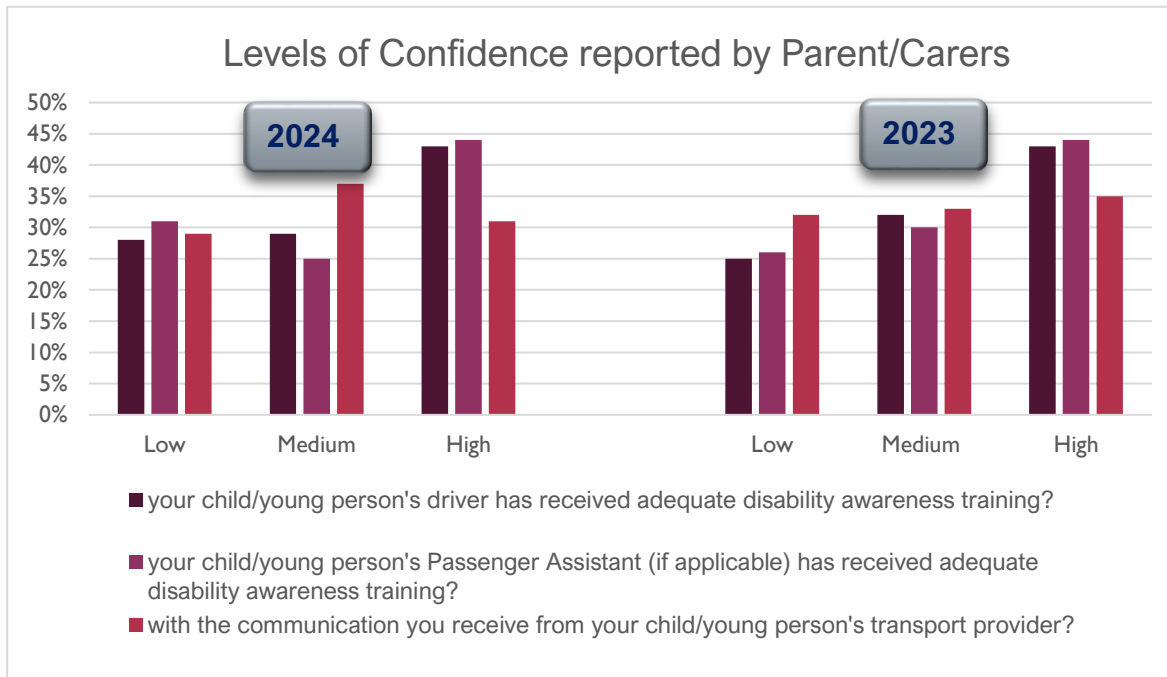
85% of applications were for a new education setting (15% were for Post 16)

Home to School SEND Transport (continued)

The previous graphic shows that transport needs remain static for nearly 70% of those in receipt of Home to School SEND Transport. For the remaining 31%, the majority of applications for new transport arrangements are made during the summer term or during the summer holiday period.



Home to School SEND Transport (continued)



The majority of parent/carers are reporting medium or high levels of confidence with the disability awareness training received by drivers and Passenger Assistants. Overall families report feeling confident in the level of communication from the transport providers.

56% of families were not offered a Meet and Greet with either the driver or passenger assistant

For those families who were offered a meet and greet, 97% were offered a convenient time for the meet and greet.

Overall, we received 91 comments regarding home to school SEND transport. The main themes, in order, were:

- Eligibility
- Positive relationships with individual drivers and passenger assistants
- Poor communication with provider and ECC
- Impact of Route and Personnel changes
- Confidence in SEND awareness by driver/passenger assistant

The majority of comments we received about eligibility are related to 'nearest suitable school'. The reasons parent/carers gave for not naming their closest school were:

- Parent/carer did not feel the school could meet their child/young person's needs; (e.g. more inclusive reputation of another school or physical environment (i.e. choosing a smaller school);
- The closest school had stated they could not meet the needs of the child/young person - (sometimes this had been the response from more than one school)
- The placement at the closest school had already broken down before EHCP was granted

Comments

We had a problem where my son's transport was not continued from one academic year to the next even though he remained in the same school. It was a mistake at county level and it took numerous phonecalls to Kinect to try and sort. When I was given the name of who to end at County, he then sorted it very quickly.

It was fine for years until my son changed schools. The LA failed to transfer the previous arrangements to the new provider.... The communication was appalling, despite my repeated emails, Social Worker and Head Teacher input.....This resulted in me having to transport my son for the first half term which was highly confusing for him and extremely disruptive as I am physically disabled and work.

They tried to say wasn't nearest school, when proved wrong they then said we lived less than 3 miles but my child has a blue badge and can not walk to school.

My child's bus driver is wonderful she communicates well and is very helpful and friendly, we had an equally wonderful PA at the beginning of the year but since she left it's been a revolving door of different faces who whilst very nice can leave my child unsettled as she doesn't know who she will see each day.

We think the main stream school where he is at is the best for his condition and that school is known for being good with neurodiverse children but that is not the closest mainstream school

Driver is fab. The driver and PA seem to be a good team and care about the children and their needs

The closest school according to their guidelines, we visited and were informally informed that they had enough students with EHCPs with no flex with a new student with one. The second closest one also made it clear informally during a visit they did not want another child with an EHCP as they were struggling with the needs of existing students without one.

We have a lovely lady driver and lady assistant, with their own personal experience with Sen - children. 100% confident with them.

We had to move house when our son was in year 3. We couldn't afford to stay in walking distance of the school. My mum was doing my childcare so I could go to work and they were having to get busses across Colchester to try and get my son to school as he often refuses to walk and is unsafe in public areas. They were also having to take my 2 year old in a buggy and by the time my son was getting to school he'd often suffered multiple meltdowns and anxiety attacks resulting in him not being in the right frame of mind to do his learning. I couldn't move him schools as he can't cope with unfamiliar people and places - so for us, his current school was the 'nearest suitable school' due to his needs, but we were told the council would not understand that and that we couldn't apply. Transport would have been such a huge help for my son to help him have a calmer start to his day and be able to arrive at school regulated and ready to learn.

Conclusion

One of the most frequent themes in feedback we receive from families is about the anxiety caused by the uncertainty of Home to School SEND Transport arrangements at the start of the academic year for their child or young person. This is then exacerbated, for some families, by a number of route and personnel changes that follow in the first few weeks of the new term. We understand that **some** school placements are allocated in the summer term or even in the school holidays, but the majority are agreed much earlier. We feel that there needs to be a greater understanding as to the reasons why the majority of new applications for Home to School SEND Transport are made in the summer term or holiday period. Once these reasons are understood, the current process can be reviewed to see what needs to be changed to ensure applications are made at a more appropriate time.

Our survey feedback has shown that 25% of families who do not apply for Home to School SEND transport have already been told they are not eligible. It is not possible to establish from our survey data the exact reasons for their non-eligibility. However, the comments received from parent/carers about eligibility suggest that the issue lies with the confidence in the ability or willingness of schools to effectively meet the needs of their children/young people. We acknowledge that the scope for being able to influence any change in eligibility criteria for Home to SEND Transport is limited as this is dictated by national guidance. Likewise, building an education system where parent/carers can be confident that all schools are equally equipped to provide an inclusive environment and meet the needs of children and young people is determined by numerous factors beyond the control of a single local area.

Improved communication is something that families tell us they would like to see. This is especially important where vital information about their child/young person's needs, including what equipment is needed, is required to be shared with new transport providers. These issues can lead to inappropriate transport arrangements being put in place, and children/young people who are then unable to travel to school on their transport. If parent/carers have no means of transport themselves, this means children and young people are unable to attend school. Parent/carers have told us that once they can contact the right person, the issues can be resolved quickly. However, it is often difficult to obtain the right contact information, causing frustration and delay in arranging appropriate transport.

Next Steps

Our suggested next steps would be to establish a group with representatives from the Quadrant SEND teams, the Home to School SEND transport team, the Education Awards team, ourselves and the Multi-Schools Council to understand what is contributing to the gap between school placement allocation and applications for Home to School SEND Transport. There should also be a focus on the process for sharing of information about children/young people's needs, especially when a new transport provider is appointed. The group will also need to consider what elements of the current process need to be changed to ensure that parent/carers receive the right information about applying for Home to School SEND Transport at the earliest opportunity.

Whilst we cannot change the eligibility criteria outlined in statutory guidance, we do feel there is a need for parent/carers to be better informed about key elements of statutory guidance and entitlements to Home to School SEND Transport. This could be produced as an easy-to-read guide and will enable parent/carers to have a clearer understanding of decisions made in relation to their eligibility status.